

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JUNE 16, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

ELEVENTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We come together to observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
All: Renew us by your Spirit, Lord.
One: We come together to praise God with festive songs and shouts of joy!
All: Renew us by your Spirit, Lord.
One: We come together to hear the voice of our Savior calling us to compassion.
All: Renew us by your Spirit, Lord.
One: We come together to experience the abundance of God's grace.
All: Let us worship God.

***OPENING HYMN** "Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service" [*Tune #490*]

- 1. Lord, whose love through humble service
bore the weight of human need,
who upon the cross, forsaken,
offered mercy's perfect deed,
we, your servants, bring the worship
not of voice alone, but heart,
consecrating to your purpose
every gift that you impart.**
- 3. As we worship, grant us vision,
till your love's revealing light,
in its height and depth and greatness,
dawns upon our quickened sight,
making known the needs and burdens
your compassion bids us bear,
stirring us to tireless striving,
your abundant life to share.**

(continued...)

4. **Called from worship to your service,
forth in your dear name we go,
to the child, the youth, the aged,
love in living deeds to show;
hope and health, goodwill and comfort,
counsel, aid, and peace we give,
that your servants, Lord, in freedom
may your mercy know and live.**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**God, have mercy on us.
We ignore your Word as if it were unimportant.
We flee from your presence in doubt and rebellion.
We enjoy idle pleasures and pursue lives of leisure
while others stoop to serve us
and struggle to support themselves.
We enact rules and regulations
that benefit the wealthy
at the expense of basic needs—human health and daily bread.
Forgive us, we pray.
Heal us where we are withered
in hand or heart or faith.
Set us free to serve you.
Redirect our wrong ways
and lead us to the ways that make Jesus visible in our lives. Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: God restores us to wholeness and grants us new opportunities for life.
No matter how far we have strayed into the ways of death,
we can begin again as free and forgiven children of God.
Our burdens are lifted, our spirits are renewed,
as God's love is rekindled within us and in all our relationships.

All: **Like weary travelers in the wilderness,
let us drink deeply of God's grace.
In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.
Thanks be to God!**

THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: **And also with you.**

(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READING Mark 2:18-3:6

MARK 2:18-3:6 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition)

¹⁸ Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, and people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" ¹⁹ Jesus said to them, "The wedding attendants cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. ²⁰ The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day.

²¹ "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. ²² Similarly, no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins, but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."

²³ One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" ²⁵ And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food, ²⁶ how he entered the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions?" ²⁷ Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath, ²⁸ so the Son of Humankind is lord even of the Sabbath."

^{3:1} Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. ² They were watching him to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³ And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." ⁴ Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. ⁵ He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ⁶ The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "The Old Has Become New Again.

The New Has Become Old Again?" by Pastor Bill Vincent

It's all about the new (so it seems).
It all has to do with the new breaking into our lives.
You see, something new and wonderful is irrupting into life, into our lives, into the life of the world.

And the world can't (seem to) take it.
"Out with the old and in with the new!"
At least that's what appears to be the case.

Though maybe not quite.
Yes, what Jesus presents in his ministry and in his person is different, radically new.
So it appears that the old has had its day. Time for the new to take its place and the old to be discarded.

But that's not exactly what is said.
As Lamar Williamson points out, there's a tension at work in this talk of the old and the new.

It may be significant, for instance, that the reason one sews on patches is to preserve an old garment.... Thus, while the major thrust of the text is parallel to Paul's "the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (II Cor.5:17), Jesus' teaching here has [a] paradoxical quality ... an inner tension: sometimes the old must be preserved.

...the text's paradoxical counterthrust..warns against the easy assumption that everything old must be bad and anything new must be good.
(Interpretation series, p.69-70, 71-72)

And I am reminded of one of the key passages regarding the old and the new: words in the book of Isaiah addressed to the people in exile, where God says,

*Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*
(Isaiah 43:18-19a NRSV)

"Do you not perceive it?"

Just note that before these words – *"Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old"* – at the exact same time the Lord references that "thing of old" – the Exodus – speaking of that *"way in the sea,"* the *"path in the mighty waters."*

Almost as if to say, "Don't remember...yet do."

"I'm about to do a new thing." But the only way to see it and understand it is if we have some inkling of the old thing done: the 'old thing' that, at the time, was a new thing, and now forms a critical part of our faith memory that paves the way and plows the furrows for the new way and the new seed and the new thing to take root and bear fruit and blossom in our midst and bloom in us.

"Here's a new thing!"

But keep in mind (in an appropriate way) the old thing.

“And remember always,” the Lord seems to say, “the old thing you remember was once the new thing I did for you. And I can do a new thing now, too. Just watch me.”

And so this Jesus arrives on the scene.

And this new thing that God does, does not demolish or obliterate the old thing. But does create a thing so new and different that it requires root-level changes in our hearts, root-level changes in the way we see life and live life; so as to make the old feel (in some ways) *passee*.

Like a new wine that requires new wineskins.

And this relationship between the old and the new is masterfully illustrated by the conversation and controversy over the sabbath.

The disciples pick grain as they pass through a field, something that (according to the Pharisees) is not lawful to do on the sabbath.

Remember the sabbath?

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ... you shall not do any work...
(Exodus 20:8,10 NRSV)

But questions arose: ‘How do we keep the sabbath holy?’ ‘What does it mean not to work?’ So a body of regulations developed to define the issue and answer the questions.

And the disciples appeared to be going against this understanding of the sabbath.

But recognize that, as Jesus defends his disciples (and what seems to be a new thing they are doing), he uses a story from scripture as precedence. He goes back to an old story about David to justify what the disciples are doing. The old in service to the new.

And note, in both stories we read, Jesus never suggests getting rid of the sabbath; never recommends discarding sabbath observance.

But he does radically reinterpret the sabbath and its observance.

Though not as radically as you might think.

Yes, he seems to say – clearly – that the command not to do work on the sabbath must give way to human need, either as hunger (on the part of the disciples), or healing (on the part of the man in the synagogue). Give way to human need, defined as “doing good” as opposed to “doing harm”; “saving life” as opposed to “killing.”

And, truth be told, this interpretation is not as radical as you might think.

For there was definitely a line of thought and reasoning among the Pharisees themselves that said that the doing of good superceded the regulation not to do work on the sabbath.

So, why didn’t the Pharisees agree with him and move on? Why were the Pharisees so upset that they “*conspired with the Herodians to destroy him*”?

The real answer to that question may always come down to a matter of speculation on our part.

But it does seem reasonable to say that Jesus’ claim regarding the sabbath simply went too far for the Pharisees.

Remember: Jesus has been proclaimed (by the people) as one who “*taught with authority, and not as their scribes*” (1:22). He has demonstrated his power to cast out demons

and heal people (1:27,31). He has even claimed authority to forgive sins, and demonstrated that authority fairly conclusively...to anyone open to hearing and seeing that (2:10-12).

And now he is claiming, in his way of identifying himself as “the Son of Humankind,” to be “*lord of the sabbath*”: to have authority over the application and interpretation of the sabbath.

Who does he think he is?

Perhaps it's safe to say this is just too much for the Pharisees. He's gone too far. This is the straw that broke the camel's back.

But this “last straw” is not simply about some petty regulation.

Remember, the sabbath was one of the Ten Commandments, foundational to the people's life and their understanding of God's will for them and for faithful living before God.

But also note, keeping that sabbath had developed into a vital way for the Jewish people to affirm their faith, and faithfulness, and to distinguish themselves from the rest of the world. To keep the sabbath was a powerful way to say, “We are the people who worship the God of Israel: the God who freed us from slavery in Egypt, the God who chose us for a special purpose in life and in this world.” To keep the sabbath was a vital identity marker for the people of God. “And don't mess with my understanding of my identity!”

Yet that is precisely what Jesus does.

Jesus took sabbath observance a step further – a huge step.

Yes, the sabbath has to do with the cessation of work and rest. We all need rest. That is a deep human need for all of us, and we ignore that need to our detriment.

But this rest refers not simply, or only, to not doing work.

It also refers to doing good in order that others, and all, might know that rest and recuperation, that wholeness of life before God.

And so Jesus transforms the sabbath from a list of regulations to be kept (no matter how noble the intent), to a way of life to be embraced.

A way of life that affirms and embraces the rest and recuperation that we need – which is a far cry from the breakneck speed of our “must always be productive” culture.

A way of life that also affirms and strives for the good for others, from provision for the hungry to wholeness for the broken: “To do good, not harm; to save life, not to kill.”

This transformation of the sabbath is new, wondrous, and life-giving.

But this transformation is also threatening to those who see their identity defined by the keeping of those regulations. And it is a threat to the power and position and prestige they might enjoy in enforcing those regulations.

And this transformation (and others like it) is the very ‘new thing’ that is happening in Jesus, that Jesus proclaims; and that upsets the Pharisees' applecart...and sets in motion the conspiring and plotting, the scheming – and betrayal – that lead all the way to Jerusalem...and the cross.

All because of this radical, new thing that takes place in this Jesus.

And that plotting and threat is scary. That is frightening.

And, yes, we may be rightly angered at the injustice and blindness of it all.

But before we throw our stones or cast a wicked stare at those we might see as Pharisees in our midst...let us look in the mirror.

And let us acknowledge and confess the many times we have opposed the new thing, the radical thing, the thing we did not understand and did not care for. And we thought we were good and in the right when we resisted it. And yet it turned out that God was in this new thing, and we did not see that or know what, or want to see that or know that.

Yes, we too can oppose what turns out to be gracious and merciful: that which seeks to improve human life, that which seeks to bolster human welfare and well-being.

We can oppose the “new thing.” (Not saying that everything new is good – remember?)

And, quite honestly, it does not always make a difference that this new thing is God’s doing and God’s working.

For perhaps it upsets our applecart, and upturns our way of thinking and way of life, and discards what we find is familiar and comfortable.

So that maybe we’d just as soon ignore this new thing, or avoid it.

But all too often, instead, we turn against this new thing that God is doing, and seek to destroy it...or even crucify it.

But this “new thing” – this new One – is a good thing God is doing in our midst...even when we have a hard time seeing that.

And this new thing brings life and affirms life; and seeks to do good, and not harm; and wants to save life, not kill it.

And this new thing brings joy. Oh, such joy! Even at the risk of Pharisees and Herodians plotting on the side (on the sabbath, no less); plotting in the dark or in secret, unseen, unheard...until it is too late.

And yes, that’s scary...if that’s all we see.

But remember: this new thing that God is doing, this new One brings joy. The joy of celebrating life at a wedding. The joy of the hungry fed and the broken healed. The joy of ushering in good and bolstering life. The joy of well-being and wholeness. The joy of life itself.

And isn’t that worth the risk to embrace the new thing that God might be doing in our midst?

***HYMN “Take Time to Be Holy”**

**1. Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;
abide in him always and feed on his word.
Make friends of God’s children; help those who are weak;
forgetting in nothing his blessing to seek.**

**2. Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
spend much time in secret with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus, like him thou shalt be;
thy friends in thy conduct his likeness shall see.**

(continued...)

3. Take time to be holy, let him be thy guide,
and run not before him, whatever betide.
In joy or in sorrow, still follow thy Lord,
and, looking to Jesus, still trust in his word.

4. Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul --
each thought and each motive beneath his control.
Thus led by his Spirit to fountains of love,
thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.

Words: William Dunn Longstaff, ca. 1882
Music (HOLINESS): George Coles Stebbins, 1890
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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

Jesus lived with a constant sense of his Father's presence.
He put God's claim on his life above all else.
He joined others in God's worship and praise.
He drew strength from the Scriptures.
He prayed and taught his disciples to pray.
We believe Christ gives us and demands of us
personal lives that are centered in God
and open to God's reality and rule.

Christ teaches us
to put obedience to God
above the interests of self, family, race, or nation;
to offer God joyously
our money, ability, and time.
It is part of our discipline
to observe a day of worship and rest,
setting aside our own working to enjoy God's work,
celebrating with sisters and brothers the Lord's goodness.

We need constantly to search out God's way in Scripture,
not expecting detailed directions for every decision,
but relying on the Word to tell us who God is,
to press God's present claim on us,
and to assure us of God's grace and comfort.

We are charged to pray for ourselves and others
with gratitude, boldness, and persistence,
confident that God hears and answers our prayers
in ways best for us all.

Life in God's presence issues in life for others,
for if we do not love sisters and brothers whom we see,
we cannot love God whom we do not see.

(next page...)

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PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: To you, Lord God,
All: **...we stretch out our hands.**

THE LORD’S PRAYER (Contemporary)

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

We give you thanks, O God, for all your good gifts to us: for work and rest, for creativity and play, for this community in which to practice our faith together. Take the gifts we offer and use them to meet the needs of those around us. May our work and witness reflect our belief in your compassionate care for us and for all you have created. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “In the Midst of New Dimensions” GtG 315 (*Verses 1-3 & 5*)

(next page...)

**1. In the midst of new dimensions,
in the face of changing ways,
who will lead the pilgrim peoples
wandering in their separate ways?
God of rainbow, fiery pillar,
leading where the eagles soar,
we your people, ours the journey
now and ever, now and ever,
now and evermore.**

**2. Through the flood of starving people,
warring factions, and despair,
who will lift the olive branches?
Who will light the flame of care?
God of rainbow, fiery pillar,
leading where the eagles soar,
we your people, ours the journey
now and ever, now and ever,
now and evermore.**

**3. As we stand, a world divided
by our own self-seeking schemes,
grant that we, your global village,
might envision wider dreams.
God of rainbow, fiery pillar,
leading where the eagles soar,
we your people, ours the journey
now and ever, now and ever,
now and evermore.**

**5. Should the threats of dire predictions
cause us to withdraw in pain,
may your blazing phoenix spirit
resurrect the church again.
God of rainbow, fiery pillar,
leading where the eagles soar,
we your people, ours the journey
now and ever, now and ever,
now and evermore.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...
All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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